

Decision Memo

Deschutes River Gravel Restoration Project

February 17, 2006

USDA Forest Service

Bend/Ft. Rock Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest
Deschutes County, Oregon
T. 22 S., R. 9 E., S. 7 WM

I. DECISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED

A. Description of Decision

It is my decision to authorize the placement of approximately 110 cubic yards of spawning gravel into the Deschutes River to enhance redband trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss gairdneri*) and brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) habitat. The project will be implemented during the low flow period in the fall of 2006, and will not require the use of heavy equipment instream. The project is in partnership with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

B. Location

The project is located 0.25 miles below Wickiup Dam (river mile 226), approximately 45 miles southwest of Bend, Oregon. The legal description is T. 22 S., R. 9 E., S. 7.

C. Purpose of Decision

This area is substantially deficient of gravel that provides spawning areas for redband and brown trout. Wickiup Dam and the associated reservoir were completed in 1949 to store irrigation water for the expanding agricultural industry of Central Oregon. Typical of other areas downstream of dams, instream gravel became depleted below Wickiup Dam because of the stilling effect on stream current of the reservoir. Instream gravels typically move downstream during times of high flow. Instream gravel of sizes needed by trout to spawn, typically ranging from ½" to 2" diameter, are lacking within the project area. Prior to the construction of the dam, the project area likely had a significantly greater volume of gravels in the desired size range, based on the results of recent substrate surveys of the Deschutes River upriver of Wickiup and Crane Prairie Dams. These surveys revealed significantly greater volumes of gravel in the desired size range. The substrate within the project area is presently dominated primarily by bedrock, sand, and small gravel. There is a need to increase instream gravel in ½" to 2" diameter to enhance fish habitat. This area was chosen for restoration because despite the lack of spawning gravel, there is some limited annual spawning activity; therefore spawning use of the newly placed gravel is highly likely. In addition, aquatic macroinvertebrate habitat would be improved from gravel placement.

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 section 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

I have concluded that this decision is appropriately categorically excluded from documentation as an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is a routine activity within a category of exclusion and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

A. Category of Exclusion

This decision is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.4 and Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedure Handbook 1909.15. This decision falls within category 31.2(7) established by the Chief of the Forest Service to provide for modification or maintenance of stream or lake aquatic habitat improvement structures using native materials and normal practices. I have reviewed the physical and biological conditions of the fish habitat with resource specialists. I have concluded that the proposed activities are consistent with the intent of fish habitat enhancement in accordance with the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy. I have concluded that no extraordinary¹ circumstances exist which would indicate this action could have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. This decision may be implemented immediately upon my signature, and is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8 (a) (4).

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

In determining the appropriateness of using the categorical exclusion, a determination of the potential impact to the resource conditions identified in FSH 1909.15 Section 30.3(2) must be made. The following is the list of the potential effects to the resource conditions from the project activities.

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated habitat or species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat

Wildlife Species - A northern bald eagle nest has in the recent past been located within ¼ mile of the project area. However, the nest tree was recently struck by lightning, damaging the nest tree. Surveys will be made in the spring of 2006 to determine if use of this nest site will be continued. A Wildlife Biological Evaluation prepared for this project concluded there would be no effects because the project would occur outside of the breeding season. This evaluation also concluded there would be no effects to any other wildlife species or their habitat that are federally listed or proposed for listing. The project is outside of the range of the northern spotted owl.

¹ As defined by the Interim Direction "Clarification of Extraordinary Circumstances for Categories of Actions Excluded From Documentation" appearing in the Federal Register Vol. 67, No. 164, August 23, 2002.

Aquatic Species – Redband trout, a Region 6 Forest Service Sensitive Species, is located within the project area. A Fisheries Biological Evaluation concluded this project would have beneficial effects to redband trout and their habitat because spawning habitat would be improved.

Plant Species - A survey of the area of the proposed staging area for the gravel and the road leading to the site was conducted 9/20/2005 by a Forest Service botanist. No Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, or Sensitive species or habitat were located, therefore the Botany Biological Evaluation concluded the project would have no effects. A survey in September 2005 was also conducted of the gravel pit that would serve as the source of gravel. Some scattered weeds were located, but were either species of low concern, or were located too far from the project site to be of concern. The Noxious Weed Risk Assessment concluded the project would have a low risk of noxious weed introductions or spread, but did prescribe one Management Recommendation, which is listed below:

- (1) Clean all equipment before entering and after leaving National Forest System lands. Remove mud, dirt and plant parts from project equipment before moving it into project area and before proceeding to the next project.

The Deschutes River Gravel Restoration Project meets all applicable Project Design Criteria as described in the 2003-2006 Joint Aquatic and Terrestrial Programmatic Biological Assessment. A biological assessment (BA) and/or Level I review are not required.

2. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 provides direction to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, “. . . the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year.”

- The area where the gravel would be temporarily stored prior to placement in the river is located on the road bed and parking area for the streamflow gaging station, all of which are within the floodplain of the Deschutes River. This project would have no adverse effects to the existing condition of the floodplain. Due to the spring-fed nature of the Upper Deschutes River Basin, and the controlled flow regime at Wickiup Dam, the Deschutes River rarely floods to the degree necessary to occupy the portion of the floodplain where project activities would take place.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 is to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. Wetlands are defined by this order as, “. . . areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds.”

- A riparian area of approximately 10 to 15 feet width is found along the Deschutes River within the project area. Project activities would not occur within riparian areas. The project would have no adverse effects to wetlands.

Municipal Watersheds

- There are no municipal watersheds within the project area.

3. Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and national recreation areas

The project area is located within segment 2 of the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River corridor. Section 7A of the Wild and Scenic River Act requires an analysis of potential impacts on the free flowing nature of a river from any water resources project with federal assistance, or which requires federal permitting. The section 7A analysis addresses the compatibility of the proposed water resources projects to the free flowing character of the river and how it relates to the protection and enhancement of the values for which the river was designated (Outstandingly Remarkable Values). The free flow analysis was completed by Deschutes National Forest staff in September 2005 and concluded the project would not have adverse effects to the free flow nature of the river or the Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

The project is not located within a wilderness or national recreation area.

4. Inventoried Road less Areas

There are no inventoried road less areas in the project area.

5. Research Natural Areas

There are no existing or proposed Research Natural Areas in the project area.

6. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties of areas

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act covers the discovery and protection of historic properties (prehistoric and historic) that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It affords lawful protection of archaeological resources and sites that are on public and Indian lands. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act covers the discovery and protection of Native American human remains and objects that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It encourages avoidance of archaeological sites that contain burials or portions of sites that contain graves through “in situ” preservation, but may encompass other actions to preserve these remains and items.

There are no known sites or properties. The project is non-ground disturbing.

Conclusion

Based on the conclusions regarding the effect to the resource conditions listed above, I have found that no extraordinary circumstances exist with the proposed project activities that may result in a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT/SCOPING

The project was listed in the 2005 spring and summer issues of the Central Oregon Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). In addition, this project was listed among others in a Notice and Comment legal notice published in The Bulletin, Bend, Oregon, on October 23, 2006.

No public comments were received.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

This decision is consistent with the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and its accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement as amended by the Revised Continuation of Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem, and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales (Eastside Screens) (1990). The Forest Plan is amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy (1995), which provides standards and guidelines for protection of watersheds and Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas. The project area is within a Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards for protection of riparian areas. No riparian vegetation would be impacted, and no equipment would work within the river.

V. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This project will be implemented during the fall of 2006.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is not subject to administrative review or appeal.

VII. CONTACT PERSONS

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Tom Walker (Project Lead) at the Bend / Ft. Rock Ranger District, 1230 NE Third Street, A-262, Bend, OR 97701 or via telephone at 541-383-4000.

Phil Cruz
District Ranger

DATE

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Deschutes River Gravel Restoration Project

Deschutes National Forest



Deschutes River

Project Area

Wickiup Reservoir

Bend

Project

0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles

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